intra-region trade and an action plan for poverty alleviation; and

(b) if so, the details thereof and the reaction of the Pakistan thereto ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI R. L. BHATIA) : (a) Yes Sir. The 7th SAARC Summit has finalised a framework Agreement on a SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA). They have also adopted a consensus on eradication of poverty in South Asia.

(b) SAPTA envisages arrangements relating to tariff, paratariff, non-tariff and direct trade measures. Negotiation of tariff preferecnes will initially be on product-by-product basis. Least developed contracting States are protected by providing them wherever possible, special and more favourable treatment under this Arrangement which by an earlier decision of the 12th Council of Ministers, is to be made fully operational before December 1995.

The decisions relating to eradication of poverty in South Asia are based upon recommendations of the Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation established at the Colombo Summit. The Dhaka Declaration commits member Governments to the eradication of poverty in South Asia, preferably by the year 2002 AD, through an Agenda of Action which embodies strategies of social mobilisation, decentralised agricultural development, small scale labour-intensive industrialisation and human development policies which emphasise the rights to work and to primary education.

Decisions in SAARC are unanimous. Pakistan was therefore as much party to the above decisions as other member States.

Fake Passports Racket

252. SHRI SUSHIL KUMAR SAMBHAJIRAO SHINDE :
SHRI MURLIDHAR CHANDRAKANT BHANDARE :
SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA :

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether a racket involving issue of fake passports with far reaching consequences, in facilitating the escape of terrorists and proclaimed criminals from the country has come to light;

(b) if so, what are the details indicating modus operandi thereof; and

(c) what action has since been taken and is being taken in the matter ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI R. L. BHATIA) : (a) and (b). Information regarding different rackets involving fake and fraudulent passports is received by the Government from time to time. Apart from the printing of counterfeit passports, these rackets inter alia include obtaining passports by submitting false or forged documentation; substituting photographs on the genuine passports; obtaining passports in false names; forging entries in genuine passports; obtaining passports by giving false information etc. Terrorists and proclaimed criminals might utilise these rackets.

(c) The Government has initiated steps to streamline the procedure for issue of passports and to improve the quality of the passport booklet to prevent tampering in order to deter the issue of fake and fraudulent passports. The Passports Act 1967 has been amended to provide for more stringent penalties for violations.

As and when specific cases come to the attention of the Government, necessary steps are taken under the law.

Implementation of Economic Oriented Foreign Policy

253. SHRI SUSHIL KUMAR SAMBHAJIRAO SHINDE :
SHRI MURLIDHAR CHANDRAKANT BHANDARE :
SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA :

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether any concrete steps have been or are being taken towards evolving and implementing an Economic Oriented Foreign Policy, as mooted at the recent All India Congress Committee's Session at Faridabad; and

(b) if so, the details in this regard ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI R. L. BHATIA) : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The Ministry of External Affairs has taken several measures towards giving greater economic orientation to India's foreign policy. The changes that have taken place in the global, geo-political scenario and the imperatives of our own economic reform programme have made it imperative for us to adapt our foreign policy accordingly, so that our economic and commercial interests get due priority. In this context, the Ministry & its Missions and posts abroad have accorded top priority to attracting foreign investment, securing access to required technologies, aggressively promoting our exports and ensuring continued flow of financial resources on concessional terms from bilateral and multilateral channels. These are recognised as important foreign policy objectives requiring close economic ties with major powers such as the European Community, USA, Japan, ASEAN and the Gulf and are getting the full and concerted attention of the Ministry of External Affairs. As a part of this effort, during the recent visits of the Prime Ministers of Spain and UK and the German Chancellor, special attention was paid to economic interactions with these countries. Interactive sessions were arranged between senior Government officials and the high level business delegations accompanying the British and Spanish Prime Ministers and the German Chancellor. The Indo-British Partnership initiative which brings the business communities of the two countries together to work towards closer economic relations is one example of concrete measures taken towards imparting a greater economic orientation to our foreign policy.

Extradition Treaties with India

254. SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) what is the number of the countries with whom India have extradition treaty till today; and

(b) the number of countries with whom Extradition Treaty is under consideration ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI R. L. BHATIA) : (a) We have extradition treaty with eight countries ; Belgium, Bhutan, Canada, Nepal, Netherlands, UK, USA and Uganda.

(b) Proposals for concluding extradition treaty have been made to or have been received from nine countries : France, Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, Namibia, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey and UAE.

Pending Passport Applications

255. SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) how many applications are pending for issue of passport in different passport offices and since how long; and

(b) what steps Government are taking to expedite the issuing of the passports ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI R. L. BHATIA) : (a) The total number of pending applications for fresh passports as on 2-4-1993 was 10.2 lakhs of which 7.83 lakhs were pending over one month.

(b) Government have taken a number of steps to expedite issue of passports which inter alia include augmentation of the staff strength; increase in the supply of passport booklets and streamlining procedures to increase productivity and reduce delays.